

“Where’s the ‘I’ in the EFL ?”

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Abstract

Contemplative and mindfulness pedagogy aims to fully incorporate the first-person perspective into the learning process. Involving the Self in the process of investigation helps dissolve the barrier between subject and object, teacher and student, ‘I’ and the world, enticing the heart to open and inviting the mind to explore the wonders of the unknown, promoting in students a passionate and compassionate view of learning, life and the world in which we live. I begin this discussion with a personal example of how I came to learn about mindfulness as an inspiration and source for teaching and learning as background for the review of the formal goals of contemplative and mindfulness pedagogy. Building upon the role of the first person in education, how experience shapes the learning process in general and language in particular is also considered. Finally, a description of a university English language class implementing mindfulness is offered for examination.

Part I : Finding my own voice

Perhaps the most important point is to ensure that science never becomes divorced from the basic human feeling of empathy with our fellow beings... What matters above all is the motivation that governs the use of science and technology, in which ideally heart and mind are united.¹⁾

—H.H. The Dalai Lama

In 2005 I had been teaching EFL for 14 years in Japan, 10 of those at the university level, and although I liked the work I was doing, uneasy feelings began growing within me of dissatisfaction, boredom and irritation ; a general dullness that seemed to surround my daily activities. Not knowing at first where the seeds of those emotions lie, I began looking around me for causes : unmotivated students, various administrative duties, apathetic and solitary colleagues, salary, etc. Looking for causes of personal, emotional unrest is as easy and unlimited as looking for a vending machine in Japan. (They are literally everywhere !) I realized that I was going through the motions of teaching English, and I experimented with various methods to try to relieve my own lack of motivation, such as Brain-based Learning (Jensen), Multiple Intelligences (Gardner), and various techniques specific to EFL. At the time, it seemed that no matter what I tried, the students, although almost always polite, were not motivated enough, the staff was unsupportive, there was no budget for new equipment, and so on. I pictured myself 20 years in the future, full tenure secured, but not liking the person I was seeing. I saw a cynical,

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¹⁾ H.H. the Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom*. (The Dalai Lama, 2005. Paperback ed. by Abacus.) p. 11.

boring, frustrated man with any excuse for a vacation and to keep my head buried in his research. This was not a vision I enjoyed looking at, and I knew that a change was needed. These feelings festered inside of me for about 2 years, until finally I decided to take action and responsibility for my own life. I applied for a one year sabbatical, not to research my area of specialty or write a book, but to pursue my love for Yoga. As you might already have guessed, I was refused, and rightly so. With that refusal, I politely took my leave of the university, all on good terms and with well wishes (and I thank the administration and my colleagues for that), and I spent six months each in Thailand and the USA to study Yoga as well as various massage modalities. Although it took some adjustment time on my part (at first, I found myself critiquing the teaching methods of the school!), I eventually learned to be a student again and concentrate on my studies. I came back to Japan after a year and started a small Yoga and massage studio from my renovated home. Slowly, yoga students and massage clients arrived, but I struggled to keep up with the house payments and other bills, so that each month was a financial challenge. Little by little, the stress of that began to build until the complaints began seeping from my mouth; the usual habits of looking for causes around me. And then, one snowy day, as my wife and I were shoveling snow from the parking area, and I was complaining, my wife (being the enlightened being I now know her to be), just stopped, looked at me and said, “What is the problem? You are doing exactly what you said you wanted to do. Why are you so unhappy?” At the moment, I snapped back some excuse that I don’t recall, and I was angry, but those words stuck to me like natto on my moustache. (Natto is a Japanese food that is made from fermented soybean and it is very sticky!) That was the question and the answer I was searching for! What was preventing me from enjoying and appreciating everything I already had and was working towards?

I decided to follow the advice of William Shakespeare, when he says to his mother Ophelia in Hamlet, “Get thee to a nunnery!” And so I did, in effect, do just that. I enrolled in a 10-day silent Vipassanaⁱ meditation retreat in the mountains near Kyoto city. 11 hours a day of meditation, vegetarian meals, and no conversation (except those in my head!) might just clear up a few things, I thought to myself. And to my surprise and relief, it did. For the first time in my life I was able to really see for myself, by myself, what this thing “Self”ⁱⁱ is. It is a rare occasion that one gets to really stand back and look at oneself uncritically, just looking and seeing what is there (or absent). I was given the opportunity to do that, and I am grateful for that time. I have continued to meditate in that tradition as well as others, and have found the effects continuing to increase and deepen. To sum up here what I have since discovered: I was the cause of all my own boredom, frustration, stress, and apathy. My attitudes, my expectations, my fears; in essence, my own learned, habitual patterns of thought were causing my suffering. The world around me was just moving, just doing what it does. The people and situations around me were getting the blame for my unhappiness when all along I was the only one who had control over that.

When inner reactions to the outer world can be seen clearly through a compassionate and calm point of view, responding to the world comes easier, with less effort, and with warmth. It is only when we fully live through and move past the inappropriate responses can we make progress that informs knowledgeable and ethical decisions on a daily basis. When emotional triggers almost instantly produce a variety of habitual thoughts and ideas that spur us on to take action, the consequences of those actions are

severe. It takes education, practice and courage to really feel the heart’s fluctuating energies and understand the storms of thought that follow. Educating the mind to look inwards invites a wisdom of Self and the workings of the world. This leads to appropriate courses of action in any type of environment, wherever and whenever one finds oneself. This type of education leads to inner awareness and peace of mind which can then be reflected outward, helping to create a more peaceful society built upon mutual respect and freedom. This is precisely the aim and foundation for contemplative pedagogy. On its homepage, the aims for The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society are stated :

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society believes that a fully democratic society requires a system of higher education that trains students for reflective insight as well as critical thinking. We believe that the cultivation of mindfulness amid the busy-ness of contemporary life can open up the possibility for developing new wisdom through introspection, to complement existing intellectual and analytic undertakings. We also believe that contemplative practices can help shape the direction of social action, contributing to an integration of the ethical and the political, the spiritual and the practical ; the undergraduate college is one place where these issues can and should be thoughtfully explored.²⁾

Part II : Opportunities for learning

I would like here to describe and comment on my participation in the 2010 Fall Retreat for Academics, Garrison Institute that was sponsored by the Center above. As you can see from the program content shown in Appendix A, besides the meditation sessions, discussions, and mindfulness sessions, there was a silent period in the middle of the program. This was my first academic retreat, so silence was something I was not prepared for. All of the conferences and workshops I had attended in the past for academic purposes were so full of ideas, techniques, methods, and theories that I could hardly absorb all of the information. This was different. During the meditations, arts encounters, and walking practices I could feel my past experiences creeping up into my consciousness, egging me on to expect more, ask for more details, instruction, discussions... I could feel pinches of irritation as I knew the contents of the program would find its way into this report. How could I objectively describe what happened in an academic report ?

I finished the program, got on a plane home, and instead of feverishly taking notes on the experience as I normally do, I just let the experience sink in. I tried not to over-analyze the experiences or to arrange them in some form of acceptable traditional academic schema. I just let them be inside myself for a while, and I waited. And then slowly, I chuckled to myself as if I had finally gotten the punch-line of a joke I had heard days before. The same techniques, methods, and ultimately ways of being I had been introducing into my classes were those I experienced in the retreat. The different kinds of meditations, the silence, introduction to the Arts, and of course, the free writings and discussions were practical options for my English classes. Through its elegant simplicity, the Academic Retreat had encouraged me to explore my inner landscape of educational expectations, fears, and stereotypes, both conceptual and

²⁾ <http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/academic/about.html>

emotional. It gently forced me to reach for deeper conclusions about my own hesitations and tendencies when teaching, and how to help my students engage the subject of study. This paper then, is really an extension of my own experiences from that retreat and the reflections I have come to know. I would like to thank the instructors, organizers, and participants from Garrison for inviting me into their time, space and hearts during those few short days of reflective inquiry.

Part III : Preparing the ground

There are an infinite number of reasons why students lack motivation for their studies ; systemic, cultural and personal. Although important, only knowing the reasons for student apathy is not something teachers can work with in the classroom. When we frame our inquiry differently, however, we find that the answers can be an implementable part of the curriculum. In the Japanese university system, I believe two correlated questions are vitally important, “Can students be taught to overcome six years of past emotional baggage from English classes based on passing the university Entrance Exams ?” and “Can we (again) instill in our students’ hearts and minds the qualities of child-like curiosity and wonder for new learning ?” In essence, “Can students unravel negative mental habits learned over years and replace them with positive ones?”

To free the mind from wasteful, damaging, habitual patterns of thought entails knowing the forces that entangle the mind in experiences of the past and imaginations of the future. Thoughts themselves come and go all the time, but those thoughts in which we have “belief”, those which, in the words of Pema Chodron, “hook”³⁾ us and which have become part of our experience are the ones which prevent us from concentrating on the present moment. According to Palmer and Zajonc, “Academic culture needs to embrace the simple fact that cognition, which is our business, is intimately linked to affect, no matter how much we think emotions are not our business...Thinking is done by the *mind*, which is not an organ but a process that is distributed throughout the body and draws on every faculty we have.”⁴⁾ For example, when engaged in any conversation with friend, colleague, or stranger, as we converse, physical, emotional, and conceptual stimulations trigger memories that bubble up from the mind (both conceptual and affective) in real time as we hear the speaker’s words, intonation, see facial and bodily gestures and posture, and think about possible motivations for the speaker’s conceptual and emotional stance. We consider this “normal”, and for everyday functioning in modern society, it is a necessity to some degree, but it also prevents us from really hearing what the speaker is trying to convey. We get so caught up in our own inner monologue that the intentions and meanings of the speaker get filtered through our own experiential multi-colored lenses, thus what we really understand from a conversation is often misleading at best. We have brought our own conceptual and affective baggage along for the conversational ride, mixing our own ‘stuff’ in with the other person’s ‘stuff’ to come out with new mixed ‘stuff’. In doing so, we lose our ability to truly understand the other’s intention. Misunderstanding and perhaps tensions can increase and interpersonal harmony becomes perilous.

There are proven and effective ways of becoming aware of and controlling these tendencies in our-

³⁾ Chodron, Pema. Getting Unstuck. (Audible Books, Audible.com. Downloaded 2010.)

⁴⁾ Palmer, Parker & Zajonc, Arthur. The Heart of Higher Education. (Jossey-Bass, 2010) p. 41.

selves to mix our past and future emotional and conceptual worlds up with present environmental stimulation.ⁱⁱⁱ Being aware of these habits allows the Self to referee the present moment and watch from a relatively detached vantage point. Which thoughts are directly involved with trying to understand the speaker’s intention and which are internal chatter vying for air-time? This is not a trivial question. The fact is that most of us are ineffectual listeners. We go through our day thinking we see and understand the world, when in fact what we understand and believe is our own inner monologue and interpretation of how the world is and should be according to ‘me’. (Bhadantacariya, 1991 ; Bikku Bodhi, 1999 ; Dalai Lama, 2005 ; Goleman, 1995 ; Gunnlaugson, 2009 ; Lichtmann, 2005 ; Satchidananda, 1990 ; Svartmarama, 2002)

What does this have to do with English education ? Most teachers in their professional careers focus on teaching the ‘what’ of the English language ; vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, conversational patterns, etc. These are necessary ingredients for a language learner, no doubt, and I would be amiss if I were to trivialize the importance of this. However, I am also very aware that many university students (who are not English majors) have very little real interest in learning English, some even dreading the English class. In my heart of hearts, I can’t blame them. I imagine myself sitting in a hard chair for six years of Japanese secondary education getting English grammar and translations drilled into my brain under authoritarian rule. This kind of educationally self-defeating method and emotional outcome in students is similar to the history of women in mathematics. “Sheila Tobias told us why girls and women, once upon a time, failed so miserably at mathematics. It is not because the female brain is structured in such a way as to make computation difficult... Rather, it is because girls were told from a very young age that their gender cannot do math, so they walked into math and science classrooms paralyzed by an emotion called fear.”⁵⁾ I can’t count how many times I have heard Japanese people say to me, “I studied English for years but I still can’t speak English” or “Japanese aren’t good at English.” I wonder how many of their preconceptions and eventual shortcomings were actually learned in the classroom ! It’s time to reverse the effects and start encouraging, working towards a common goal of deep knowledge instead of competing for mundane facts, and creating a hospitable environment where the courage to participate is rewarded with insight.

Throughout the English language education world of conferences, textbooks, workshops, techniques, and methods, the one thing that is known but rarely outwardly nourished (because it’s seen as too sloppy, inconvenient or hard to teach methodically) is that we bring our whole Self into language ; our thoughts, emotions, conscious and subconscious, memory, imaginations, physical bodies, all of us. Contemporary English education has drifted into an antiseptic realm of linguistic facts and concepts, prepositions and propositions, subject-object agreement rules, multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank performances in which our students are mostly unwilling, passive, language assembly-line attendants. Students are performing all these miraculous feats with no personal involvement. Their “I” is not a meaningful part of the conversation in a human activity (language) that *requires* involvement of the Self in order to exist (that is, language for conveyance of intention and meaning.) Real conversation is never purely mechanical in nature. I don’t mean talking *about* the English language or linguistics. We

⁵⁾ Palmer, Parker & Zajonc, Arthur. The Heart of Higher Education. (Jossey-Bass, 2010) p. 41.

can get very emotional about the proper use of articles in English and we can have a flood of memories and emotions from the simple mention of a particular word or phrase (e.g., “Transformational Grammar”). In most cases, the English language classroom is a shadow of the social, communicative real-world environment ; a human-less arrangement of English lexicon poorly simulating shared intention in the outward form of dialogue.

When we deny our students their individuality alongside critical, rational data, their deeper intentions are stifled. The separation of Self, one for the class and one for the rest of the world, does not satisfy the intrinsic need we all feel to be in harmony with our world. For the teacher as well as the student, knowing and being able to express the Self is to bring one’s different aspects into harmony and into a place of centeredness. When we really learn something and gain insight into that realm of knowledge, we understand with our whole being ; our heart, mind, and soul bearing witness to that newfound Truth. With the merger of Self and subject, a new insight is formed that is more than the sum of its parts. Now a fundamental, scientific principle of reality, the interrelatedness of the self with that which is under investigation is coming into full force in the sciences.^{iv} Education needs to step up to the plate, as it were, to this reality. New textbooks, techniques, nor methods alone will bring about a willingness on the part of the students to express themselves. This ‘force of intention’ comes about from a deeper place inside the student. When students feel safe, acknowledged, and curious about English and about each other, then exploration within the classroom community will naturally follow.

Admitting ignorance and encountering diverse viewpoints on facts and interpretations require us to clarify our assertions, explain ourselves at deeper levels and perhaps, *mirabile dictu*, even change our minds. Professors who encourage student behaviors such as these invite true intellectual rigor, the kind that emerges from a community of inquiry and is far more educational than a nonstop diet of “rigorous” lectures. From where the students sit, these behaviors are also riskier than keeping one’s head down and taking notes. That kind of behavior is not going to happen in a class that lacks hospitality, a class where people feel too threatened to say anything that might get them crosswise with the professor or other students.⁶⁾

We need to address the deeper issues involved with teaching and learning language. Conceptual thought is only one necessary ingredient for insight and wisdom. Passion for knowing, a child-like curiosity, is another essential item. Another necessity is time. It takes time for the passion of curiosity to find direction, and even more time to absorb, reflect on, and weave the parts of Self together with the subject of study. Inspiration is born from these, not in an orderly and linear fashion based on a neatly defined syllabus. But given a supportive, safe environment with plenty of guided, thought-provoking stimulation, the energy of the classroom community will begin to flow in creative ways so that a transformation is allowed to occur. This transformation is nothing less than a remodeling of the embodied mind ; a reorganization of perception and knowledge towards a deeper truth, the ultimate goal of undergraduate education. Fortunately, the number of courses and programs in the American college and uni-

⁶⁾ Pamler, Parker & Zajonc, Arthur. The Heart of Higher Education. (Jossey-Bass, 2010) p. 30

versity system that include a contemplative component is on the rise. Stimulated by concerned educators from around the country, The Center for Contemplative Education offers grants to teachers interested in incorporating a contemplative approach in their curriculum. Mirabai Bush, Executive Director, states, “Despite the constraints on higher education that often inhibit change, there are now more than 120 (Contemplative Education) fellows in 80 colleges and universities throughout the country, including liberal arts schools, Ivy League universities, state universities, and traditionally Black colleges.”⁷⁾

The reaction to these courses from students, faculty, and administration has been overwhelmingly positive. This seems obvious in hindsight. Students tend to forget individual facts and statistics soon after the test is finished, but those same facts and statistics, when given the chance to form bonds with parts of the Self, become experiences and memories that last a long time, sometimes forever. But where, when, and how are these experiences formed?

Part IV: The Nature of Experience⁸⁾

What are these things we call experiences ? Are they just abstract images or static, time-encapsulated events in our personal histories ? Experiences are not something that happen to us from outside, neither are they something trapped in our minds, solitary and separated from the outside world. An experience “comes about” when our minds merge with something of significance.⁹⁾ As John Dewey explains,

An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment... The environment...is whatever conditions interact with individual needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. Even when a person builds a castle in the air he is interacting with the objects which he constructs in fancy.¹⁰⁾

This ‘transaction’ is what we call experience. Situations occurring “out there” are not experiences until they make a connection “in here”, in our bodies, hearts, and minds. Without actually stating the term, Dewey is referring to a non-dualist insight ; the mind and the world in direct connection, cooperating and mutually affecting the other. Although Dewey stops short of this, a formal non-dualist approach asserts the co-emergence and co-dependence of perceiver and perceived : as the body and mind mutually receive and react to sensory information, the character of that information changes and the mind as well as the physical brain changes along with it.

⁷⁾ Mirabai Bush. *Teachers College Record* (Volume 108, Number 9, September 2006) p. 1721 For a full list of Fellows Scholars, please refer to the Center’s homepage, <http://contemplativemind.org>

⁸⁾ Portions of sections IV-VI were previously published in, “*Mindful vs. Mind-full ; Experiential Awareness as a Second Language Learning Tool.*” by Grossman, Barry. Hachinohe University/Hachinohe Junior College Sanbunken Journal, #18, March 2009, pgs. 117~131 and “*Cognitive Linguistic Applications in the English L2 Classroom.*” by Grossman, Barry. Hachinohe University Journal #39, December 2009, pgs. 27-36

⁹⁾ Valera, Thompson, and Rosch. *The Embodied Mind.* (MIT Press, 1991)

¹⁰⁾ Dewey, John. *Experience & Education.* (Touchstone 1938) p. 43

“In view of the fact that experience alters brain structures and that specific experiences have specific effects on the brain, the nature of “experience” becomes an interesting question in relation to memory processes…Overall, neuroscience research confirms the important role that experience plays in building the structure of the mind by modifying the structures of the brain : development is not solely the unfolding of preprogrammed patterns.”¹¹⁾

The outdated idea that the body is distinct from the mind, and that we are all, as individuals, distinct from the world itself, is still commonplace. Learning has become ever increasingly “a mind matter”, and focus on the whole being in learning has given way to long hours of motionless learners using their minds alone to experience knowledge. However, in light of new neuroscience research and technology, we are finding that the body and mind both play a crucial role in both long and short-term memory and as well as total learning capacity.¹²⁾ A multi-sensory, enriched experience helps to expand and deepen learning. (Gardner, 1993 ; Jensen, 2000 ; Palmer, 2005 ; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010) “…sense, perception, action, and conception are mutually informative, and structurally linked to one another in important ways… Mind is rendered possible by bodily sensations and actions, from whose patterns it emerges and upon which it relies for whatever intellectual prowess it can claim.”¹³⁾ In contemporary Western philosophy, this view of the mind and body as not only cooperative but integrated at the most basic levels has been recently gaining mainstream acceptance. The popular expressions, “We are what we eat” “We are what we do” and “We are what we think” have all come to be valid. We are embodied beings. More formally, “we see our bodies both as physical structures and as lived, experiential structures—biological and phenomenological. These two sides of embodiment are obviously not opposed. Instead, we continuously circulate back and forth between them.”¹⁴⁾

Human experience, and therefore all learning, has proved to be embodied and non-dualistic. Furthermore, to be acutely, consciously aware (i.e., *mindful*) of these processes of experience in real time has many psycho-physiological benefits.

In clinical settings, studies are being performed in an ever-increasing number and in a vastly wide spectrum of medically and psychologically related fields. Of particular interest, “Cioffi (1991) stresses the significance of a person’s *interpretation* (my italics) of a bodily event in determining the course of that event. This is an extremely important point : cognitive interpretation or attribution is a part of understanding all bodily experience. This means that all aspects of the human psyche, including past experience, unconscious mechanisms, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as the situational context of the bodily response, may influence how we perceive bodily sensations in consciousness.”¹⁵⁾ Physical and emotional illness and health, pain and pleasure, relaxation and stress, craving and aversion ; all forms of sensation that are experienced are not objective, scalable entities across a population. One person’s unbear-

¹¹⁾ National Research Council. *How People Learn : Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. (National Academy of Sciences 2000) p. 124.

¹²⁾ Bear, Connors, Paradiso. *Neuroscience, Exploring the Brain*. (Lippincott Williams & Wilkins 2001)

¹³⁾ Bowman, Wayne. “*Cognition and the Body : Perspectives from Music Education*” in *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds, Towards Embodied Teaching and Learning*. (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004.) p. 36

¹⁴⁾ Valera, Thompson, and Rosch. *The Embodied Mind*. (MIT Press, 1991) p. xv.

¹⁵⁾ Bakal, Donald. *Minding the Body, Clinical Uses of Somatic Awareness*. (The Guilford Press, 1999.) p. 25

able arthritic pain is another’s slightly nagging irritability, given exactly the same observable level of physical illness. How an individual interprets these sensations is how the experience will be perceived—and felt. It is the mosaic of the heart-body-mind and the *perception* of these that are the components of an experience. These perceptions, when repeated often enough become engrained, learned habits which can become conscious and unconscious patterns of thought and physicality. Who we think we are, we become, but if that is not to our advantage, then we can change the way we think, and therefore, we can become anew.

Part V: Kicking the habit

And so I would like to call for a new course of pedagogical action. Since habitual patterns are hard to change, this action will require time to develop and mature. It requires very little in terms of money or resources, but mostly a willingness to change habitual thoughts of what learning is and how language should be taught. How long do we continue on this path of ignoring the deeper, experiential issues of learning while quick-fixing the surface symptoms with a new English game or technique ? Avoidance does not heal, it only delays the inevitable. To bring forth what is within our students requires insight, patience, and compassion. Most of our students do not know their Selves because they have not been given time to look. One example of this can be shown by my own experiences of teaching university-level English communication in Japan :

Me : “What kind of movies do you like ?”

Student : “... (student consults with friends) ...I like action movies”

Me : “Why do you like action movies ?”

Student : “...why ? (looking perplexed and again consults with friends) ...Because I like action.”

The answer most likely expected is, “Because they’re exciting.” or some similar response. However, allow me to continue further along these lines to a deeper level of communication that begins to include the first-person in the dialogue. Further reflective questions like, “Why do you enjoy the physical or mental sensations of excitement ? Are these feelings in any way related to a memory or future vision of yourself ? Can you identify with any of the characters in your favorite action movie ?” We all have emotional, conceptual, and self-identity packaged into every experience we have, including seemingly simple conversations. So why ignore them in the classroom ? When engaged with the English language, are students thinking about the inadequacies of their vocabulary level or the teacher that ridiculed them in the past, or are they actively engaged with the subject without hasty judgments, bias, or fear ? When anger, fear, frustration or other afflictive emotions arise (as they sometimes do), do students relay these feelings onto who is there and what is being said and what their next course of action is going to be ? What will the possible consequences of those actions be ? Conversely, being prepared to acknowledge emotions such as compassion, charity, joy, etc. and learning how these also invite various reactions from people and society brings students closer to understanding themselves and their surround-

ing environment. Wisdom comes from being aware of how emotional energies affect our thoughts (and vice-versa) and how these are entwined with the world around us. In any walk of life, these are the types of learned habits that increase the chances for personal success ; success based on feelings of satisfaction combined with a balanced mind, not a superficial form of success based on what others may believe, (perhaps the accumulation of money, power, fame, etc.) however much the society holds these in awe. As classroom leaders and organizers, we can help create learning environments that support and encourage self-exploration and wonder so that mutually beneficial exchanges can be *experienced* through the use of the English language for a purpose greater than the language itself.

At this point I hope it is clear that the heart, mind and body are co-existent and co-dependent entities. Being a language teacher for the past 20 years, I have often wondered about the connection between language learning and experience. My own junior and high school days struggling to learn French ; the mysterious worlds of adjective and adverb, masculine and feminine nouns, and polite vs. common ‘you’ created negativity in my mind about the joys of learning a second language. For a long time I tried to avoid second language education, until my dream of living in Japan emerged. My interest and relative success has been due to the variety and depth of experience I have had in the language and culture, each experience building on and connecting to my Self. My language is used to convey meaning to others in Japanese society, and each linguistic form I use is based on experiential context. This focus on meaning and not merely grammatical structure is the basis for the field of Cognitive Linguistics. Geeraerts defines the field as having a foundation and four tenets that support that foundation. These are :

Foundation : “Language is all about meaning…this approach sees language as …primarily semantic.”

Tenet 1 : “Linguistic Meaning is Perspectival : Meaning is not just an objective reflection of the outside world, it is a way of shaping that world.”

Tenet 2 : “Linguistic meaning is dynamic and flexible : Meanings change, and there is good reason for that : meaning has to do with shaping our world, but we have to deal with a changing world.”

Tenet 3 : “Linguistic meaning is encyclopedic and non-autonomous : If meaning has to do with the way in which we interact with the world, it is natural to assume that our whole person is involved.”

Tenet 4 : “Linguistic meaning is based on usage and experience : The idea that linguistic meaning is non-autonomously integrated with the rest of experience is sometimes formulated by saying that meaning is experientially grounded—rooted in experience.”¹⁶⁾

The way we experience our world, both physically and mentally, is the way language is created and given meaning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980 ; Ungerer & Schmid, 1996 ; Cadierno, 2004 *quoting Slobin, 1996* ; Langacker, 2002 ; Achard & Niemeir, 2004 ; Radden & Dirven, 2007 ; Ellis & Robinson, 2008.)

¹⁶⁾ Geeraerts, Dirk (Editor). Cognitive Linguistics : Basic Readings. (Mouton de Gruyter, 2006.) pgs. 3-6.

Our language is subjective and the meanings we apply symbolically to the world are based on what we know and think. Individual as well as shared cultural experiences play a crucial role in any linguistic knowledge and communicative exchange. Second language acquisition entails the overt learning of this environmental conceptualization. Second language learners need to learn not only the forms of the language but also functional and cognitive motivations for those linguistic forms. Being fully aware of and making use of the way another culture expresses itself linguistically is the ideal of second language learning. (Archard, Michel, & Niemeier, 2004 ; Cadierno, 2004 ; Robinson & Ellis, 2008 ; Waara, 2004.) The linguistic forms a person uses, from phonological to syntactic, are only *the results* of the way one experiences the world. Being aware of one’s experiences as the cause of linguistic formation may help unlock key elements of the language learning process.

Part VI : Mindfulness in the Classroom ?

“The faculty of bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is compos sui if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.”¹⁷⁾

The meaning of mindful as “attentive and aware” begs the question, “What is it exactly that students should be aware of ?” Facts, data, critical thinking, grammatical constructions ? Unfortunately, the Objectivist, Behaviorist, and Grammar-Translation models of learning are still the prevailing paradigms in Japanese mainstream English education. However, they continue to be questioned as being far from effective, and even possibly detrimental to individual intellectual and emotional growth and creativity. (Dewey, 1938 ; Johnson, 1987 ; Gardner, 1993 ; Goleman, 1995 ; Jensen, 2000 ; National Research Council, 2000 ; Lichtmann, 2005 ; Palmer, 2007 ; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010) A more contemplative, mindful model of EFL pedagogy may allow for the necessary enrichment of the language learning experience and help incorporate the L2 into the learner’s whole Self, facilitating cognitive functioning and usage. The following is a short description of a university English class in which a mindfulness exercise was implemented for listening comprehension and pronunciation.

-**Method :** In a Japanese university Basic English class consisting of 13 freshman, (4 girls and 9 boys) a “mindfulness-based” listening and pronunciation exercised was tested. Throughout the course of one semester, this exercise was repeated with different English text portions a total of 8 times. Instructions were given to the students by the teacher in Japanese, and translated here as follows :

“Sit straight in your chair, spine erect, and close your eyes. Feel the chair under your body. Pay attention to your sits bones, right and left sides evenly placed on your chair. Feel your pelvis connected to your sits bones, and feel your spine coming up relaxed but straight, perpendicular with the seat of the chair. Notice how your shoulders connect to your spine, and

¹⁷⁾ James, W (1927) *The Principles of Psychology*, 3rd ed. (New York : Holt.) Referenced in *Mindfulness and Mental Health, Therapy, Theory, and Science* by Chris Mace. (Routledge, 2008.) p. 51

try to keep your shoulders relaxed, but not rounded. Continue softly elongating your spine. Feel how your neck supports your head, and how the very top of your head reaches naturally towards the sky. Listen to your natural breath, flowing in, flowing out. Feeling your breath as it moves through your body, into your nose, into your abdomen...your abdomen expanding with every inhale. Each exhale releases stress, releases tension. Just concentrate on the breath. Listen to it, feel it. Now relax the muscles of your head; the top of your head, the back of your head, and the sides of your head. Relax the muscles around your ears. Pay attention to the insides of your ears... try to relax them as well. Not straining to hear me, just letting the words flow into your ears, rolling gently into your mind. Keeping this same level of relaxed awareness, listen to the following English passage, letting the words flow into your mind, not worrying about meaning or content, just let the sounds enter your ears gently... (Listening portion of text played over speakers once. Then, a silent pause for 30 seconds) How do your inner ears feel? How do the sounds flow into your mind? Feel the vibration of the sounds hanging around in your mind... (Pause silently for about 30 seconds) Now listen again, relaxing but continue to sit up straight, listening and breathing, inner ears relaxed. Using your awareness, follow the vibrations of the sounds from your outer ears to your inner ears to your mind to your thoughts. Listen again (Listening sample played again and again a 30 second silent pause.) Keeping your eyes closed, again elongate your spine, keep your head aligned straight above your neck, relax, and repeat after me (The passage was spoken slowly by the teacher in short samples of 3 or 4 words each; students repeat after each sample). Be aware of the connection between your ears and your mind, your mind and your inner voice, your inner voice and the muscles of your mouth. Relaxing, and again, repeat after me. (Passage spoken again by teacher, but a little faster this time, in samples of about 5 words in length; students repeat.) Now, being aware of your breath... aware of your body sitting straight in your chair... aware of how the vibrations of the sounds and words just spoken linger in your mind... take a deep breath from your belly... and slowly exhale fully. Open your eyes. Look in your textbook at the written words of the text and let's read together aloud (students read passage in textbook.)"

After each mindfulness session, the textbook's vocabulary comprehension, text comprehension, and discussion exercises were worked on in various modalities; individual, student pairs, small groups, and whole class.

-Observations : First and foremost, students who were reluctant to participate in previous semester activities were actively engaged. Student voices were naturally louder and clearer than with pronunciation exercises used during the past semester. "First-time gigglers" settled down after a few minutes. Some students seemed sleepy and a few heads started to bob after about five minutes. Some students seemed to have trouble relaxing as noticed by furrowed eyebrows and foreheads. Some students fidgeted in their chairs. However, based on first semester experience with these same students, there was a marked improvement in pronunciation, sentential rhythm, and clarity. Furthermore, concur-

rent and post technique concentration levels and participation increased and there was less outward signs of sluggishness during textbook exercises.

-Student feedback : At the end of the semester, students were asked to anonymously and freely write their comments about this technique. The importance of honesty was emphasized. Thirteen opinions were collected and analyzed. They are translated below.

- *“It was a new way of listening. It was interesting. I think it’s good to employ these techniques into listening practice.”*
- *“I could concentrate and I could hear the pronunciation clearly. I think it was good.”*
- *“English sentences flowed into my mind. After two or three times, even without seeing the words, I could remember them. I could hear correct pronunciation and I think my pronunciation has improved.”*
- *“I could concentrate and I could remember the words. I think it had a good effect for the listening part of the test (even though I misspelled some words.)”*
- *“This semester’s listening exercise made it easy for me to remember the words, sentences, and meaning, I think. I got a little sleepy, but the way the information flowed into my ears was very good.”*
- *“At first, because I couldn’t see the other students, it was hard timing myself to follow along with the group. But as I got used to it, I think I improved. Because this technique focuses on the ears, I think my skills will continue to improve.”*
- *“Straightening my posture, closing my eyes, and breathing deeply and slowly with English listening allowed the English to flow into my mind. It was a very good technique that I think other teachers should use in their classes as well.”*
- *“While closing my eyes it was easy to hear my own voice. It was also easy to hear other students and use them as examples. The teacher’s pronunciation was easy to hear ; I think it was a good technique.”*
- *“To be able to relax and listen to English is a good point, I think. However, I wasn’t used to sitting up straight in my chair, and I found it a little tiring and stressful at first. I think it was a good technique to improve concentration, especially for those students whose concentration is poor.”*
- *“Sitting up straight in my chair while doing a listening exercise was different from anything else I have experienced. The words entered my mind easily ; I think it was a good technique.”*

-Discussion : Although this mindfulness-based exercise was tested only a few times during the course of one semester, students ‘*experienced*’ improvement in concentration, listening comprehension and pronunciation from a critical, first-person point of view. This offers optimism for further implementation in the English language classroom. Students’ lack of concentration is often cited as a problem in the language classroom, especially in larger classes. One point for improvement in the technique may be timing. Two students reported getting sleepy during the technique. Whether this has to do with personal lifestyle habits or the length of the technique is not certain at this time, but some possibilities for refinement may be reading at a slightly faster speed, less repetition of the passage, and/or changing voice quali-

ty to include more tonal and rhythmic variation. Based on student comments, however, I am hopeful and will continue testing this and similar techniques. Furthermore, a more comprehensive approach to contemplative pedagogy is now being planned for the 2011 year sophomore English Communication class. Although contemplative education cannot and should not be reduced to mere technique, I will be employing various methods in the class to promote inner reflection and inquiry into the nature of English, their own relationships towards the English language and its various cultures, a personal relationship with the topics of study, and offer an invitation to analyze their inner worlds more deeply so that they can incorporate this wisdom into their lives. Journaling, blogging, free writing, arts projects, field trips, discussions, as well as mindfulness techniques that enhance Self-awareness will be incorporated fully into the critical, objective language portion of the curriculum. Essentially, I will be trying to engage more of the students' 'I' into the classroom community. There are various ways to engage the "I" in any course, irrespective of specialty. The 'Tree of Contemplative Practices' (Appendix B), although not exhaustive, shows a variety of contemplative approaches one may explore.

Part VII : Conclusion

Language is based on experience (individual and cultural) which can be defined as an interpretation of the mind-body-world interface. Proficiency in a second language entails understanding and incorporating the target language's conception of this interface into one's whole Self ; body, mind, and heart. Furthermore, increasing awareness of these faculties and processes can help strengthen connections to the target language and, as a result, increase the chances for language proficiency.

Teaching a second language is no easy task. Students bring along their individually and culturally embodied experiences with them to the classroom, and these continuously "pop up", helping, inhibiting, or blocking second language acquisition. The Dalai Lama said, "In a powerful image, a Buddhist text reminds us that when someone points his finger at the moon, we should direct our gaze not at the tip of the finger but at the moon to which it is pointing."¹⁸⁾ To ignore the individual experiences of the students and teach only to the 'objective' language is "to gaze at the tip of the finger", so to speak. In the areas of physics, biology, education, philosophy, health, and linguistics, the importance of re-evaluating experience as a mind-body-world mandala clears the way for a more profound way of teaching and learning a second language. Both teacher and student need to be aware of the array of experiences formed in the language classroom. Presented here, mindfulness-based listening comprehension and pronunciation shows promise as one way for students to "get to know" their own ways of experiencing the oral and auditory world of English.

Notes

- i Vipassana is a meditation technique in which the mind is gently focused but openly aware of one's physical sensations as they occur in real-time.

¹⁸⁾ Dalai Lama. *The Universe in a Single Atom*. (The Dalai Lama, Broadway Books Publishers, 2005) p. 207

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- ii The capitalized ‘Self’ refers to the transcendental self.
- iii These are the highest goals of Yoga, Buddhism, as well as various secular forms of contemplation.
- iv For more details about the interdisciplinary work of science and Buddhism, refer to the Mind and Life Institute homepage : <http://www.mindandlife.org/>

Appendix A

2010 Fall Retreat for Academics, The Garrison Institute
The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

November 11 : Entering Retreat

3 : 00-5 : 00 pm	Arrivals and Check-in
6 : 00-7 : 00 pm	Dinner
7 : 15-9 : 15 pm	Introduction To Retreat, the Practices, Each Other
9 : 15-9 : 30 pm	Meditation

November 12 : Cultivating Attention

7 : 00-7 : 15 am	Morning stretch for meditation
7 : 15-7 : 45 am	Meditation, led by Mirabai Bush
8 : 00-9 : 00 am	Breakfast
9 : 15-10 : 00 am	Meditation, led by Mirabai Bush
10 : 00-10 : 30 am	Walking Practice (Mindful walking)
10 : 30-11 : 15 am	Eating Meditation and intro. to silence, led by Mirabai Bush

*Please note that from this point forward, our group will go into silence.

1 : 30-2 : 304pm	Break
2 : 30-3 : 154pm	Meditation on sound, led by Arthur Zajonc
3 : 15-3 : 30 pm	Coffee, tea, and snacks
3 : 30-4 : 15 pm	Walking practice
4 : 15-5 : 00 pm	Meditation led by Arthur Zajonc
5 : 00-5 : 30 pm	Walking practice
6 : 00-7 : 30 pm	Dinner
7 : 45-9 : 15 pm	Contemplative Arts Session

November 13 : Inquiry

7 : 00-7 : 15 am	Morning stretch for meditation
7 : 15-8 : 00 am	Meditation, led by Arthur Zajonc
8 : 15-9 : 00 am	Breakfast
9 : 15-10 : 00 am	Meditation led by Mirabai Bush
10 : 00-10 : 30 am	Walking practice
10 : 30-11 : 00 am	Lovingkindness Practice, led by Mirabai Bush
11 : 15-12 : 00 pm	Yoga led by Sunanda Markus
12 : 15-1 : 30 pm	Lunch
1 : 30-2 : 00 pm	Break
2 : 00-2 : 20 pm	Silent Meditation led by Arthur Zajonc
2 : 20-3 : 15 pm	Meditation on Nature led by Arthur Zajonc
3 : 15-3 : 30 pm	Coffee, tea, and snacks

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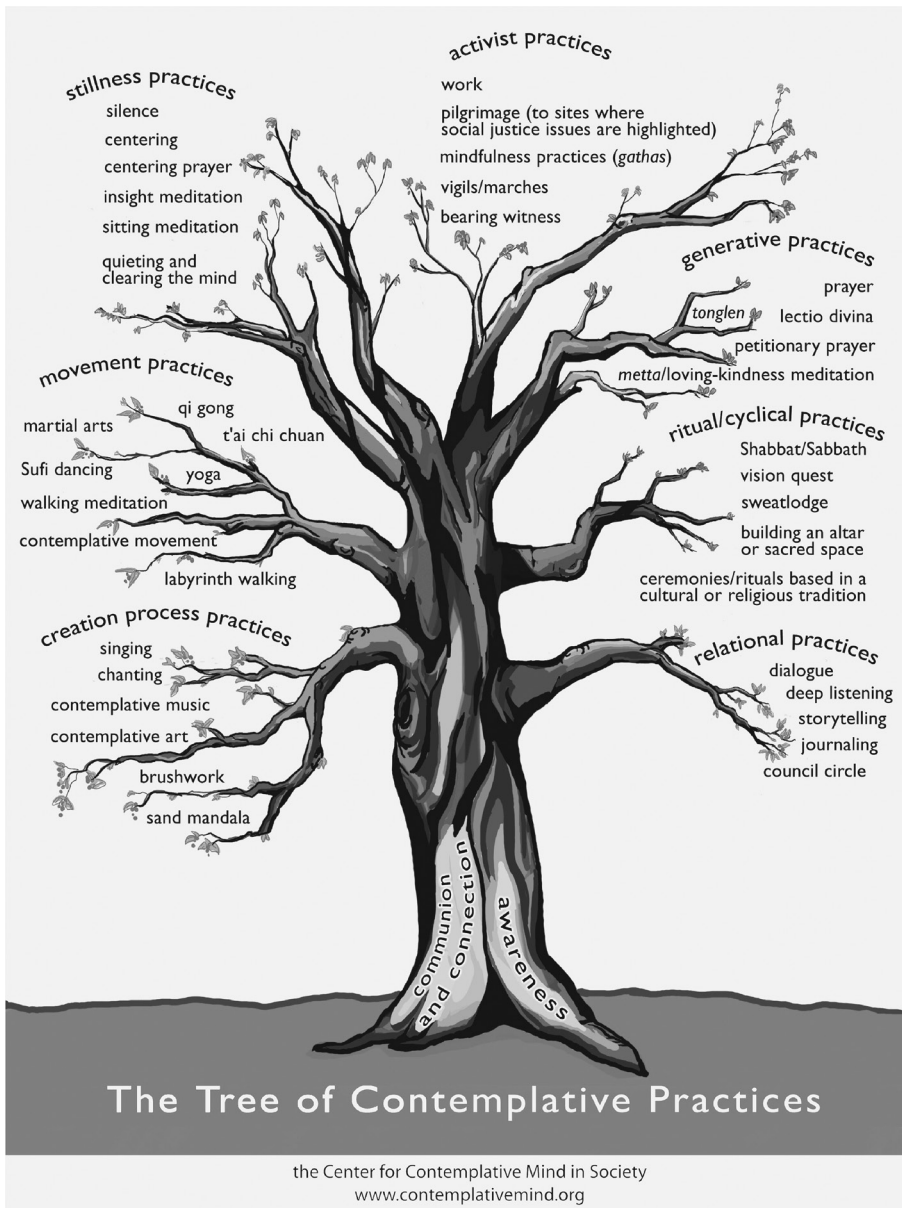
3 : 30-4 : 45 pm	Breaking the Silence : Free Writing, Deep Listening Practice led by Mirabai Bush
4 : 45-5 : 30 pm	Partners Meditation led by Arthur Zajonc
6 : 00-7 : 30 pm	Dinner
7 : 45-9 : 00 pm	Meditation and Discussion on Contemplative Teaching

November 14 : Living the Questions

7 : 00-7 : 15 am	Morning stretch for meditation
7 : 15-8 : 00 am	Meditation, led by Arthur Zajonc
8 : 15-9 : 00 am	Breakfast
9 : 15-10 : 00 am	Loving Kindness Meditation, with instruction, led by Mirabai Bush
10 : 00-10 : 30 am	Walking practice
10 : 30-10 : 45 am	Break with coffee, tea, and snacks
10 : 45-12 : 00 pm	Taking the Practice Home : Closing Circle

[Source : <http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/academic/retreat10/agenda.pdf>]

Appendix B
Tree of Contemplative Practices



Appendix C

10 Contemplative courses and programs in higher education

1. Amherst College : “Eros and Insight” (<http://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/courses/0708F/FYSE/FYSE-13-0708F>)
2. University of California, Los Angeles : Mindful Awareness Research Center (<http://marc.ucla.edu>)
3. Brown University : The Contemplative Studies Initiative (http://www.brown.edu/Faculty/Contemplative_Studies_Initiative/index)
4. University of Massachusetts, The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society ; Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) : Director John Kabat-Zinn (<http://www.umassmed.edu/content.aspx?id=41252>)
5. Teacher’s College, Columbia University : Contemplative Practices ; Educating for Peace and Tolerance (<http://tc.columbia.edu/PeaceEd/index.html>)
6. Harvard University : The Mind/Brain/Behavior Interfaculty Initiative (<http://mbb.harvard.edu>)
7. University of Michigan : Program in Creativity and Consciousness Studies (<http://www.sitemaker.umich.edu/pccs/home>)
8. Indiana State University : Center for the Study of Health, Religion, and Spirituality (<http://indstate.edu/psych/cshrs>)
9. University of Arkansas at Little Rock : The Mindfulness-Based Campus-Community Health Program (<http://ualr.edu/mindfulness/curriculum.html>)
10. Brooklyn College : Contemplative Practice Program (http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/pub/Faculty_Details5.jsp?faculty=364)

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